



Michigan County Social Services Association

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Testimony before the House Families, Children and Seniors Committee.

Good morning Chairman Kurtz and members of the committee.

I am Mel Haga, Executive Director of the Michigan County Social Services Association. The association represents the 83 county human services departments, the human services boards in each county, and the clients the local offices serve.

I am here today to speak to HB 5223 (H-1), which requires substance abuse testing for applicants and recipients of the Family Independence Program (FIP/cash assistance).

The association supports the concept of substance abuse testing from the standpoint that the ultimate goal for every applicant and recipient of cash assistance is their transition to self-support and self-sufficiency through employment. It seems logical that as we seek to transition FIP recipients to employment that we strive to ensure that the barrier of substance abuse is cleared in conjunction with, or before, we invest in training and placement assistance for our clients. But we have a number of concerns with the provisions of HB 5223(H-1) in its present form.

If the legislature wishes to enact a law of this nature, we ask that you consider MCSSA's following concerns:

HB 5223 (H-1) places the cost of the drug testing on the applicant or recipient. This is a cost to the applicant and recipient even if the client tests negative. A cursory review of information puts the cost of the actual test in a range from \$30 to \$60 depending on the type of testing used. The average FIP grant is less than \$400. We see this cost as a burden for the clients and recommend that the cost be borne by the state, the entity requiring the test. At a minimum the state should bear the cost if the recipient tests negative.

The bill is totally silent on any treatment options for those clients who test positive. MCSSA thinks that if we support a diagnosis for determining drug use we should also support and finance appropriate treatment for those who test positive for using illegal drugs. Without a funded treatment modality the required testing only becomes a vehicle for barring families from receiving cash assistance and not a means to promote and ensure self-sufficiency.

HB 5223 (H-1) requires the department, by not later than January 1, 2013, to institute suspicion-based substance abuse screening and testing in three or more counties. Because this approach to addressing client substance abuse can impact not only the client but also their families, and because it has been controversial in other states that have attempted it, the procedures that will